342 Housing

342 The type of house, whether big or lowly, made a difference in the comfort and care of women. The big houses were teak-paneled and floored with a good roof of thatch, tile or corrugated iron. Their high piles insured dryness during flood season. The sleeping and living space was a single airy open room, often with one or two sides balustraded rather than solid, and protected from the weather by the roof's overhang. The kitchen was sometimes a separate room. There was always one small enclosed room, perhaps ten feet square, or larger, with a door and a window. This room was used for keeping valuables under lock, and whenever privacy was desired: as a marriage chamber for bride and groom, or as a quiet room for a senile parent. Because of its almost solid walls, it was poorly ventilated and hot. Childbirth took place in this little room, if convenient, or out in the main part of the house. The fire-rest was in this room so that the dreaded wind could be kept out.

[844]

342 The poor lived in modest earth-floored cottages of bamboo
184 frame, thatch sides and roof, with one or two raised wood plat-
352 forms for sleeping and sitting. In the rainy season, these
844 cottages could be damp. In fact, one October the water was observed ankle deep inside a house, and the wife splashed around at her chores. Under the latter conditions, a woman in childbirth would be moved to some kinsmen's house. Delivery took place on one of the sleeping platforms, and post-partum rest was on a plank raised off the earth floor, unless space permitted that the plank and temporary fire-floor be placed on the platform. On one observed occasion reed mats as protection from drafts were temporarily set up, making an enclosure about three feet high within which a mother lay in her post-partum rest period.

434 Cash

434 Cash was short to everyone. The poor felt very poor and
426 the rich did not feel rich. This was because the rice-money,
556 which came in a lump sum once or twice a year, was at once turned over to clear debts, to make large purchases of agricultural equipment, to repair the house, or to perform elaborate ceremonies. What was left over was not kept around the house for day-to-day expenses for fear of robbery, but was immediately loaned out. Thus cash was not available for emergencies
434 which in childbirth might mean taxis or hospital care. Being
844 rich or poor made little difference in Bang Chan, however, as
556 to the quality of the obstetrical help given.

Chapter IV

THE BIRTH OF A CHILD

Dūan and her husband, Song, had a 2 year old son, Chai.[32] They lived and worked with her widowed mother, Lek, and her unmarried sister, Mī. The comfortable house stood high on piles, surrounded by rice fields. On a nearby mound lived Sāi, 60 years old and full of energy, the youngest sister of her grandmother.

Now Dūan noticed that again her menses had stopped. Her mother had described before her marriage what this meant. With happiness in her eyes, as the first time, she told her husband, then her mother, and at the first opportunity, her husband's parents. There was no reason to keep her pregnancy secret. Since she and Song would be happy to have either a boy or a girl, she did not seek out the ritual means which existed to induce a child of a particular sex.

During the months of anticipation, Dūan worked along as usual in farming and house-keeping. Lek reminded her of prudent behavior. "Women are easily upset when pregnant. It is up to you to put yourself in a cheerful mood. Everything you do will affect the infant in your womb. If you see a scarred person, your child will be scarred. Be calm, look only at pleasant things and avoid jerky motions. Do not overeat, lest the child be a glutton. If you sleep during the day and are inactive, you will also have a lazy child. Some girls are trying to be like Bangkok people, pleading that they cannot do heavy work in the last few weeks of pregnancy, but that will cause a difficult labor."

To increase her appetite, early in her pregnancy Dūan visited a Chinese pharmacist to get medicine. He had so

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32. This account puts together data from several informants. Particularly illuminating phrasings are quoted exactly, over and above the conversations, which, though fictionalized, are also direct transcriptions.

443 noodles. Their prices were higher than in Minburi or Bangkok, but their service was such a convenience that many people rarely went to town. Some adults in Bang Chan had never been to Bangkok though almost all had visited Minburi, about 3 [437] miles from the temple. Venders often extended credit, and also accepted items such as fresh fish, fruit, and eggs on a barter basis, thus providing an outlet for small amounts of home products. When the subsidiary canals were dry, however, venders could not get to some parts of the village.

Home Sites and Houses

General Arrangement

361 487 Since the canals provided the chief means of local transportation for much of the year, and also supplied water for many household uses, houses were built near the canal, usually within sight of a neighbor's. Home sites were mounded up to a level of two or three feet above that of the fields, but even so, water might cover the mound at the peak of the rainy season. Old wooden houses were set in a grove of bamboo, bananas and other fruit trees and vines, occa- 343 sionally betel and coconut palms. Nearby might be a shed for the water buffalo which were the draught animals used in farming. Rarely one saw a walled privy.[1] On the same mound might be a cottage built by parents for married children or by an affluent farmer for a hired hand. In this case, the threshing floor, firewood from trees on the mound, and area 342 for kitchen garden would be shared. Many houses were built on stilts to avoid flooding when the water level was high. If the house was elevated sufficiently, the area underneath provided a relatively cool shelter during the hot season for the buffalo, and even for family members for some of their daytime activities.

Depending on the resources of the family, houses were built of either thatch or wood, roofed with thatch, galvan- 352 ized iron or occasionally, tile. Split bamboo or matting might be used for dividing walls if the house had more than one room. Wooden flooring was usual, but in simpler thatched houses with dirt floors, the buffalo might be sheltered under the same roof with the family. In such a house, one or more low wooden platforms were built for sitting and sleeping. Wide cracks between floor boards conveniently permitted betel 364 chewers to spit without the need for a spittoon. Those who 267 were preparing food or clearing up after a meal could also thus discard refuse or dispose of leftover food that was to 364 be given to chickens, without leaving the kitchen. Some

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1. cf. Hauck, 1956, p. 45-6 for description of latrine facilities.

221 435 Despite the availability of fish and of vegetables in the canal, the highest cash outlays for family food occurred in this transplanting season. Several factors probably contributed to this: increased food energy needs because of long hours of work, venders again accessible because of high water, cash from sale of last year's crop still in hand, the convenience of cooked foods and snacks, and perhaps the need to replenish household supplies after the long drought, or after their depletion by a ceremony.

221 512 The two months of September and October during which the rice grew afforded some respite. People slept a little longer and breakfast was not prepared so early. The skilled cook might take over and could give more attention to food preparation. All who could, took the opportunity to visit and take trips. A few might go on a pilgrimage. Therefore, in this season, all family members were less often together at the evening meal. Fishing was a continuous occupation, with some preserving and home craft. Jobs such as selling food in the market were undertaken for ready cash; houses and equipment were built or repaired. Finally the threshing floor was prepared.

342 133 High water caused time-consuming inconvenience only in earth-floored cottages where it was necessary to keep the rice stores and chickens dry, move the cook-stove, and either build plank walks or cook standing ankle deep in water.

243 221 By November, the earliest varieties of rice matured. Those who owned several rice fields could put at least one into an early type. Many persons, by then short of rice, were glad to be thus tided over. One grandmother divided her first harvest among her several long-since-independent married children; 2 tangs[1] of milled rice per family, 40 for herself.

461 226 434 426 443 The heroic labor of harvest occupied December, January, and February. Farmers raced against the all-too-fast lowering of the water in the canals, without which sheaves could not be moved and buyers could not come for the paddy. People worked all daylight hours in the fields, threshed far into the night. At this time also many varieties of fish matured and men fished night after night. Just when the convenience of purchased food was greatest, cash was exhausted. With rice money in sight, venders might be generous with credit, but they could navigate only the larger canals, so were not available to many.

000 There was an important psychological difference between

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604 1. One tang equals 20 liters. Milled rice weighs about 16 kg. per tang.

4:Phillips E-4,5 (1956-1957) 1966
AO7 Central Thai AO7
Bang Chan

Houses in the village vary considerably in appearance: from the bamboo and thatch dwellings of the poorest families to the sturdy, great gabled houses of teak built by Bang Chan's original settlers to the tiled and corrugated iron-roofed homes of the newly rich. Most, however, follow the traditional Siamese pattern of being built on posts two to ten feet off the ground, mainly as a protection against flood waters. Many homes in Bang Chan give the impression of being permanently unfinished, the bamboo houses because they require constant refurbishment, the wooden dwellings because they are made of teak which seasons best when left untreated and exposed directly to the elements. The merging upper-class urban pattern of painting teakwood has not yet reached Bang Chan.

The major thoroughfare of the community, bisecting it in a north-south direction and perpendicular to the Bangkok-Minburi highway, is Khlɔɔŋ (or Canal) Bang Chan, which links with Khlɔɔŋ Sɛɛn Sɛɛb three kilometers south of the village. The latter, dug in the 1840's and originally intended as a military route to the Cambodian frontier, is one of several major canals dug during the mid-nineteenth century as part of the vast canal system that was constructed in the Central Plain when the region was opened for commercial rice production. Together with the highway built since World War II, a one-hour bus ride to the capital, Khlɔɔŋ Sɛɛn Sɛɛb, provides the villagers with their major access to Bangkok and the rest of the Central Plain. By motorboat a trip to Bangkok via this large, bustling canal takes approximately three hours.

Despite these relatively good communications facilities and the long-standing Thai peasant tradition to *paj thiaw* ("to go around"—for fun, on visits, pilgrimages, often for long distances) few people outside the immediate vicinity of the village have ever heard of Bang Chan. The community is neither a landmark nor is it located near one; it is not famed for any activities (other than having become the research site for the "American professors"); and because it is not a spatially integrated village, Bang Chan cannot even be found on any map of Thailand. Like most Thai settlements, Bang Chan has a Buddhist monastery and a government elementary school. It is these two structures that give the village its identity and the local people a sense of belonging to a community. People say that they live "at home in Bang Chan" because they make their merit at the monastery of Bang Chan and send their children to the Bang Chan school. Approximately five square miles in size and inhabited by 1,771 people living in 296 households (1956 village census), Bang Chan seems in physical appearance and social significance like the thousands of other communities that dot the rice fields of the great Central Plain.

To what extent Bang Chan may be considered "typical" in an analytic sense of other villages of the Mɛɛnaam Valley, or even of the country as a

*243 Of 47 farms which had negative labor incomes, 37
434 were in the class interval of from -1 to -2,000 baht, 9
[435] from -2,001 to -4,000 baht, and one -- the least efficient as far as this measurement is concerned -- produced as low a labor income as -8,006 baht. This last farm had to support a large family of eleven members. With an acreage of 40 rai, which was rather small relative to the size of the family (another family of ten was operating a 110-rai farm in that same year), it was natural that this farm did not have much rice to sell.

*243 In figuring farm expenses, we intentionally left
434 out the dwelling and included as farm buildings only the
• 342 ones that housed the buffaloes, farm equipment and materials.
[427] The main reason for this omission was that there was a wide
[435] range of dwelling facilities in Bangchan -- from a teak building valued at 30,000 baht to a dirt floor thatched shack valued at no more than a few hundred baht. Besides, rental for a dwelling in rural areas of the country is practically unknown. Since a family living in the village must have their own dwelling regardless of their occupation, it was considered in this study that dwellings should be separated from farm investment. This consideration was further substantiated by the fact that when a family gives up farming they continue to live in the dwelling while all the farm equipment may be sold.

*243 When the charge for dwelling is dispensed with for
434 the reasons given above, the only difference between labor
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